

King reviewing condo proposal; residents say it's too large

By Mark PavilonisEditor

Plans for a six-storey condo building in Schomberg has drawn public scrutiny and initial opposition. Township staff are reviewing the proposal by Marcor Realty and residents voiced their concerns at the first public meeting recently. The plan is for an L-shaped building that will contain a mixture of roughly 73 units in total. The first and second floors of the existing dwelling will also have 171 square metres of commercial space. The complex includes eight one-bedroom units, 35 one-bedroom plus den units and 30 two-bedroom units. The existing heritage building will be converted to commercial with outdoor patio space. There will be a total of 111 parking spaces, 35 at grade and 76 underground. Kayly Robbins of Weston Consulting, represented the proponent. She said the heritage home on the site will be the focal point, to maintain the character of Main Street. The building will be set back from the street. She said the plan does conform with provincial rules and York's Official Plan, which encourage mixed use and multi-storey development. The bylaw amendments sought by the developer are site-specific. The input and feedback from the meeting will be taken into consideration as the project moves forward. Staff noted the building covers roughly 33% of the lot and landscaping the remaining 46%. It's designated as village core in King's OP. While intensification of the core is supported, it must demonstrate compatibility with the village character. Visual and shadowing impacts of the building will be evaluated, along with tiering, step backs and buffering to see if it's compatible with the residential areas. King's Heritage Advisory Committee met back in February and recommended the old home on the property be designated on the Heritage Register. Currently it's neither listed or designated. Staff is reviewing the application, looking at the building mass and height; step backs, adherence to urban design guidelines and compatibility. Traffic, parking environmental buffers and floodplain managements are also being examined. Councillor Jakob Schneider said anyone who knows Main Street in the village will agree that a modern glass and steel structure won't fit in, and this building requires a more traditional look. Councillor Avia Eek said the "ambitious" project has to take flooding mitigation into account and she urged the proponents to ensure measures are in place. Councillor Debbie Schaefer questioned whether the old home on the property will actually be the focal point, since the condo will tower high above it. Resident Katie Konstantopoulos said while condos are intriguing to younger home buyers, a lower complex of perhaps three to four storeys would be preferred in this spot. This property, she said, is one of the last buildable lots in Schomberg and she'd like to see more affordable housing options. Without local transit and the likelihood that these will be expensive units will dissuade first-time buyers. Alicia Turner said residents in the core value the walkability of Main Street. They want to build a strong community, one with "smart intensification" that complements the character. She agreed affordable options are lacking and they need to do something to keep young people here and become part of this vibrant community. The OP mentions a goal of 25% affordable housing, but there's nothing affordable in today's market. She pointed to the devastation of the adjacent Dufferin Marsh and shadows cast by the building. The underground parking, in a floodplain, will also be problematic, she said. This plan, she noted, is not a local one and a six-storey building will change everything. "This isn't the right plan for us," she said. Neighbour Jeffrey Boyd said this would be one of the highest points in the village, and the plan needs major revisions. A lot of healthy trees will be removed to make way for the project and the structure will be visible in all directions. The focus, he said, won't be the heritage building, but a "towering, modern, glass structure." Neighbours' privacy will be gone and the shadow cast by this "monster" goes against what is appropriate and acceptable for Schomberg. Bryce Baker, who owns Grackle in the core, said while he may benefit from the influx of new customers, this project does not constitute mixed use in the true sense. An increase of traffic on a narrow main street will present many challenges and the construction period will cause chaos. David Hastings-Grgas has conducted research on the Marsh and local species at risk. This building will increase light pollution and impact local bats, snapping turtles and chimney swifts, to name a few. He wants environmental impact studies reviewed to ensure they address these things. Mary Asselstine, who's been a strong champion of the Marsh for decades, said this building is simply "way too massive." Given all the concerns, the concept is "out to lunch." Buffers are insufficient; "I believe in intensification in the village core to supply a diversity of housing, especially affordable housing, to provide opportunities to support local business, to activate the street and to contribute to a sustainable community." I am pleased to see that the developer will retain the heritage house on the property as it contributes to the character of the village. However the proposal is too massive to ever fit into the village and it poses unacceptable impacts on the character of the community, pedestrian and vehicle safety, and the natural features and functions of the Dufferin Marsh. As a new building it does

not fully mitigate the effects of the structure on climate change. Asselstine noted the Official Plan provides some guidelines in support of the vision for the village core. Section 5.4.3 states that the maximum height for new buildings is generally three storeys. Heights up to 6 storeys may be considered if the development is compatible with the community and designed to minimize visual and shadowing impacts and provides appropriate transition with adjacent buildings. Section 3.4.1 says six storeys may be considered for projects located in a transit zone or where the units are deemed affordable. A modern six-storey structure on top of a hill overlooking the Main Street is not compatible with the otherwise 2-storey heritage buildings in the neighbourhood. With no public transit available in Schomberg, Asselstine wants to know why a six-storey structure would be considered. Regarding traffic, she said there are constant complaints about traffic congestion and parking issues on Main Street today. Part of this is caused by a non-standard width road. Access/egress to/from the site also requires crossing a narrow sidewalk that has heavy pedestrian use. And right across the road is the Community Hall that hosts several events every year complete with its own traffic/parking issues. I just don't get it. So the question is why would we be considering a 6 storey structure at this location? Site alteration, she argued, may not occur within vegetated areas that form buffers to a key natural feature the Dufferin Marsh. Section 4.2.2 goes on to say that development or site alteration within 120 metres of a key natural heritage feature will require establishment of a minimum vegetation protection zone which is of sufficient width to protect the key natural heritage feature and its functions during and after construction. The proposal is to provide a 30-metre buffer (or in some places it is referred to as a 20m buffer) to the wetland on the south side of the property. This is a minimum buffer requirement and as far as I can tell from the EIS there was no attempt to determine a site appropriate buffer. It is clear that an appropriate vegetated buffer needs to be assessed, she said. While a study concluded that there was no significant wildlife habitat on the subject property, there is on the adjacent Dufferin Marsh. These adjacent features were reviewed generally, however, no targeted surveys were conducted. It was concluded that the wetland likely provides valuable habitat for local fauna. She stressed it's clear that research avoided looking too closely at the Dufferin Marsh and basically ignored the species of concern. We know that there are over 100 species of birds, 6 species of frogs and toads, two species of turtles, Monarch Butterflies, assorted dragonflies and other insects, bats and other mammals that use the Marsh and some of them are species of concern. We also know that the activity of these species does not stop at the property line. A six-storey wall of glass immediately adjacent to the open space area of the wetland, introducing shading, glare, light pollution, noise and continuous urban activity will be hugely detrimental. She believes the building needs to be reduced to 2 or 3 storeys, in compliance with the vision set out in the Official Plan. She would also like to see an assessment needs carried out, to determine the required buffers needed to protect the features and functions of the Marsh. Charles Cooper said it seems the developer has a cavalier attitude towards the Marsh and its importance can't be overstated. This project will have a huge impact on the Marsh. Further, Cooper said this development flies in the face of all the work that has been done to improve the village core over the years. Mayor Steve Pellegrini stressed to staff the almost two dozen items of concern that were raised. Councillor Bill Cober said there are many compatibility issues with this development in its current form. The concerns and conflicts all need to be addressed. Councillor Schaefer made a motion to have staff report back on proceeding with designating the old home as a heritage building. This affirms council's intention to designate the structure.